

Trinity Parish (Protestant Episcopal) Chapel
651 Pequot Road
Southport
Fairfield County
Connecticut

HABS No. CONN-313

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20243

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. CONN-313

TRINITY PARISH CHAPEL (P.E.)

Location: 651 Pequot Road (corner Pequot Road and Center Street), Southport, Fairfield County, Connecticut.
USGS Westport Quadrangle Map; Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 18.643720.4554750.

Present Owner and Occupant: Episcopal Society of Southport.

Present Use: Parish meeting hall and church offices.

Statement of Significance: Trinity Parish Chapel was designed by Southport architects Disbrow & Taylor and erected 1871-72. This Gothic Revival building is an excellent example of the rural church architecture which enjoyed widespread popularity throughout the country at mid-century. Designed on a simple rectangular nave-type plan with a frontal porch and decorative wooden bell cote, the small chapel's board-and-batten siding and modest though strong Gothic details create a composition which is both representative of the spirit of its time and purely unique to this sheltered coastal village. The chapel was built during Rev. Edward Wells' rectorship. As an ardent believer in religious training, he dedicated the chapel as the parish school.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1871-72. The Parish began to plan for the construction of the chapel in December 1870. Minutes recorded at the December 27th meeting follow.

"The Object of the meeting was explained by the Chairman. Showing the need of a Suitable Building for Church purposes and the necessity of a Parish School and the manner of conducting it. Resolved That the Parish hereby give their consent to the erection of a Chapel or otherwise providing a lecture room on the Grounds adjacent to the Church building and belonging to Trinity Parish Provided that said building be erected, leaving no debt on the Parish. Resolved that such building shall be for the use of a Parish School. And for such other Church purposes as

may be necessary. Resolved That the Rector, Capt. Johnathan Godfrey and Franklin Bulkley be a Committee to erect a Chapel when the means necessary for such a building have been provided for to their satisfaction."

On April 19, 1871, the Southport "Chronicle" noted the building committee's progress: "The Trinity Parish Parochial School Committee seem to be taking hold of this school project in earnest. They have already surveyed the ground upon which the school building is to be erected, adjoining the church."

During the chapel's construction, the "Chronicle" periodically noted the builders' progress.

July 24, 1872 "The foundation wall for the Parish School building is completed. The edifice is to be finished in time for the Fall term."

July 31, 1872 "The Parish School building was 'raised' last Thursday [25th]. It will be some fifty feet long with ample accommodations for the growing wants of the school."

August 7, 1872 "The parish school building approaches completion."

September 25,
1872 "The Parish School opened on Monday [23rd] in their new school house."

2. Architects: Disbrow & Taylor.

The "Chronicle" reported on May 17, 1871, "We have had the pleasure of a private view of the designs for the Chapel, through the courtesy of Messrs. Disbrow & Taylor, the builders. It is a very pleasing design, and will present a fine aspect when erected."

The Southport builder and architects, Disbrow & Taylor, were established in 1871. On January 1, 1873, the partners extended the firm by the admission of a Mr. F.S. Wheeler, builder and draftsman, to the team, becoming Disbrow, Taylor & Co. The Southport "Chronicle" reported on November 26, 1873, the end of the original firm: "The co-partnership of Disbrow, Taylor & Co., has been dissolved by the death of Mr. Taylor. The surviving partners will continue the business under the firm name of Disbrow & Wheeler."

3. Original and subsequent owners: The Episcopal Society of Fairfield acquired the corner lot upon which the church and chapel stand from Harriet Dimon on May 22, 1854.
4. Builders, suppliers: Jelliff & Northrop. The "Chronicle" noted on July 17, 1872, "Messrs. Jelliff & Northrop have contracted to build the new Parish schoolhouse."
5. Original plan and construction: The Chapel was originally constructed as a free-standing structure. Twentieth century additions have made it a part of the extended church complex. Designed on a simple rectangular nave-type plan with a frontal porch and decorative wooden bell cote, the small chapel's board-and-batten siding and modest though strong Gothic details create a composition which is both expressive of the rural church architecture popular throughout the country at mid-century and purely unique to this protected coastal village. The otherwise simple plan is given over to details which inherently possess a sense of upward movement and contribute to the over-all vertical thrust of the building. Most important to the success of the ascending composition is the chapel's finely scaled rectangular shape topped by an expansive, steep pitched roof. Sheathed with vertical boards and punctuated at short, regular intervals by long, slender battens, the materials alone used to cover the chapel's surface direct the eye upward. The four corners of the main block and two exposed corners of the front entrance porch are reinforced by buttresses which are surmounted by steep gables.

A complement to the rhythmic evenness of the wooden siding is the predictability of the symmetrical three-bay front facade. Lancet windows filled with quatrefoil stained glass in the pointed arches flank the central porch and lancet-arched doorway. The paneled door is also topped with a quatrefoil stained-glass transom in the arch. The four windows on each of the side elevations and the two in the rear wall are identical to those on the front. The climax of the chapel's Gothic design is the decorative bell cote with its steep pitched gable roof, set atop the main roof ridge. The end posts of the bell cote are visually, though not structurally, carried through the deep eaves of the front gable; the gable is braced by supportive brackets and trimmed with a sawed openwork vergeboard.

6. Alterations and additions: The original small wooden stoop in front of the entrance porch was replaced with a concrete stoop. A small brick chimney with decorative corbelling located at the rear of the building was removed when the central heating system was installed. There were originally four lancet windows evenly spaced, on each side elevation, and two in the rear wall. Two

windows on each side elevation and those on the rear were removed. When the church extension was constructed, the chapel was simultaneously enlarged at the side and rear, the steep pitched gable roof was lowered, and the original stairway to the basement, built against the chapel's southwest wall, was removed.

B. Sources of Information:

1. Old views:

Trinity Parish Chapel, general view from north, n.d., late 19th c. or early 20th c. In photograph file #38, Pequot Library, Southport.

2. Bibliography:

a. Primary and unpublished sources:

Minutes of Parish Meetings, Book of Episcopal Society of Fairfield, December 27, 1870.

b. Secondary and published sources:

Rev. Edmund Guilbert. Annals of an Old Parish: Historical Sketches of Trinity Church, Southport, Connecticut 1725-1898. New York: Thomas Whittaker, 1898, chap. XIX.

Southport "Chronicle," April 19, 1871; May 17, 1871; July 17, 1872; July 24, 1872; July 31, 1872; August 7, 1872; September 25, 1872.

Prepared by Jan E. Cigliano
Staff Historian
Historic American
Buildings Survey
January 1979

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Chapel was designed by Southport architects Disbrow & Taylor and erected 1871-72. The Gothic Revival building is an excellent example of the rural church architecture which enjoyed widespread popularity throughout the country at mid-century. Designed on a simple rectangular nave-type plan with a frontal porch and decorative wooden bell cote, the small chapel's board-and-batten siding and modest though strong Gothic

details create a composition which is both representative of the spirit of its time and purely unique to this sheltered coastal village.

2. Condition of fabric: Good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The one-and-a-half story structure is rectangular with a projecting entrance porch on the south and measures 26'-3" (northwest front facade) x 55'-6".
2. Foundations: The original foundation may have been faced with cut brownstone blocks, similar to those used on the church building. The chapel was raised several feet in 1951 to provide additional classroom space in the basement. As a result of this alteration, the foundation was reconstructed using bricks, field stones, and concrete blocks and faced with concrete.
3. Wall construction, finish and color: Wooden clapboards cover the wall below the sill line. Above the sill, wooden vertical board-and-batten siding covers the wall. All surfaces are painted tan. Wooden buttresses, surmounted by steeply pitched gables with rounded ridges, are at the four corners.
4. Structural system, framing: Wooden frame construction. The original first-floor ceiling joists are two-by-six inch members set 2'-8" on center. Roof rafters are three-by-six inches, set 2'-8" on center. The collar beams which are set between the rafters are two-by-four inch members.
5. Porches, stoops: The original small wooden stoop, consisting of a step and small landing, has been replaced by a concrete stoop flanked by an iron railing on either side.
6. Chimneys: Originally, a small brick chimney with decorative corbelling was located at the rear wall of the building. It was removed when the chapel's heating was incorporated into the church heating system.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The main entrance is through the south (front) vestibule. Uniform with the main section, the vestibule's gable is trimmed with a molded cornice and simply carved vergeboard; a quatrefoil window ornaments the gable pediment. Three-quarter length buttresses with steeply pitched gables brace the

porch's front corners. The six-paneled door is framed by a lancet-arched surround and topped with a quatrefoil transom, which fills the pointed arch.

- b. Windows: The two windows on each side elevation and the windows flanking the central entrance porch are four-over-four light double-hung sash. The quatrefoil stained glass which fills the pointed arch is visible from the exterior though covered over on the interior. Small circular windows filled with quatrefoil lights ornament the front and rear gables. A similar window in the entrance vestibule's gable is painted over.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Gable roof covered with gray asbestos shingles.
- b. Cornice, eave: The roof surface extends beyond the wall to create a deep eave, without brackets, and terminating in a molded cornice. At the gable ends, the eave is supported by two heavy wooden brackets. A carved, openwork vergeboard of simple design ornaments the gable pediment.

- 9. Tower: A decorative wooden bell cote with a pointed-arched opening sits atop the central roof ridge at the chapel front. Quatrefoil and triangular motifs trim the tower above the opening. The bell cote is topped by a steeply pitched gable roof with a molded cornice similar to the principal cornice.

C. Description of Interior:

- 1. Floor plans: The original interior plan was a simple rectangle with a frontal porch and two small rooms at the rear of the building, probably used for office space. In recent years the steep pitched ceiling has been lowered, and the space greatly enlarged as a result of additions to the side and rear.
- 2. Stairways: A small stairway to the basement along the southwest (side) wall has been removed.
- 3. Flooring : Linoleum covers all floors.
- 4. Wall and ceiling finish: Vertical board wainscoting with plaster above. Both surfaces are painted gray. The ceiling was originally plaster with a cove cornice. It was lowered two feet, eight inches in 1951, covered with acoustical plaster and painted gray.
- 5. Doorways and doors: A door separates the chapel from the entrance vestibule.

6. Mechanical equipment:

- a. Lighting: Modern electrical fixtures.
- b. Heating: A small brick chimney originally located at the rear wall, was connected to a small cast iron stove. Both the chimney and stove have been removed and a central heating system now services the building.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The Chapel is located at the intersection of Center Street and Pequot Road, sixty-five feet northeast of the church, facing northwest.
2. Historic landscape design: As originally laid out, one walk extended from Center Street to the church, and a second was laid at a tangent to the Chapel's entrance steps, turning ninety degrees at its western corner, and continuing along the southwest side. A delicate cast-iron fence encompassed Trinity's grounds. At present, only the slate walk between the church and Center Street remains.

Prepared by John G. Waite
Project Supervisor
Historic American
Buildings Survey
July 1966

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey in cooperation with the Southport Historic District Commission, several members of whom provided the necessary funds. The project was completed in the summer of 1966 under the general direction of James C. Massey, then the Chief of HABS; Ralph Schwarz of the Ford Foundation; and Architect John G. Waite (Columbia University); with assistant architects Christopher Benninger (Harvard University), Richard Haines (University of Kentucky) and Andrew Craig Morrison (University of Michigan), and architectural historian David T. Van Zanten (Harvard University), at the HABS Field Office in Southport, Connecticut. The data was prepared and edited in HABS Washington office in January 1979 by Jan E. Cigliano, staff historian. Photographs were taken by HABS staff photographer Jack E. Boucher in September 1966.